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ABSTRACT

Traditional educational practices of Indigenous Canadians were aimed at cultural transmission. All adults were responsible for educating the young, but because children stayed with the women until puberty, women played the most significant role in transmitting the culture. Adults with certain gifts and talents looked for similar attributes in children and then had the responsibility to nurture those gifts and talents to fruition through mentoring. Data from the 1991 Canadian census show that Indigenous women tend to work in service-providing areas, echoing their traditional nurturing roles, with approximately four times as many women as men working in education-related jobs. A 3-year study of eight Ojibwe women enrolled in a teacher education program revealed a strong sense of cultural continuity. Their most frequently mentioned goals as educators involved a sense of community responsibility expressed as concern for the children, future generations, and well-being of the people. The immediate challenge for Indigenous Canadians is to transmit cultural knowledge through an education system that is primarily Eurocentric. The broader responsibility is to develop a system that incorporates, advocates, and teaches Indigenous ways of knowing, controlled by Aboriginals. The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) at Queen's University (Ontario) demonstrates how these goals have been pursued within the constraints of the university environment. Fifteen ATEP components are presented that support and recognize interpersonal and community connections, culturally relevant education, and Indigenous ways of knowing. (TD)

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Indigenous Women in a Canadian Teacher Education Program: Culture-creators in Action

A paper prepared for the the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, April, 1998

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Introduction

The goal of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of adult Indigenous women enrolled in a Canadian teacher education program, and their roles in supporting and furthering Indigenous culture through the medium of teacher education. Several ways in which Indigenous women have exercised agency in identifying and creating learning conditions which foster Indigenous cultural growth are explored in relation to implications for program planning. This goal was pursued with the hope that such knowledge would contribute to our own and others' ability to provide a better in-school environment for Indigenous women's adult learning and growth to occur, while adding to the knowledge about Indigenous adults who enrol in higher education.

About the authors.... This jointly authored paper is written by two women who bring distinct perspectives based on differing backgrounds. One author, who will be identified in this paper by her first name, Jan, is a woman of Indigenous ancestry (Mohawk) with multiple roles as clan mother, single parent and teacher education program graduate. The other author, who will be identified in this paper by her first name, Kate, is a woman of Anglo Saxon ancestry, a Native Studies graduate who has worked in Indigenous education for over two decades and is currently completing a doctoral thesis in adult education. As co-coordinators of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) offered through Queen's University, Canada, the authors hold the shared goal of providing optimal learning conditions for Indigenous students and the shared belief that learning 'is a matter of how people transform through participation in the activities of their communities' (Rogoff, 1994, and Bruner, 1986). Like Lyons (1990), the authors also endorse the perspective that knowledge is contextual, thus culture, or "what we do every day" (Barer-Stein, 1988) has an impact on knowledge, and knowledge on culture. From this perspective, teaching and teacher education may be viewed as a powerful tool to de/reconstruct culture. It is with this perspective in mind that the activities of Indigenous women as culture-creators-through-education become particularly interesting.

Briefly presented here are pertinent historical contexts in Indigenous education in Ontario (as pertaining to our students, who are, for the most part, of Iroquois, Ojibwe, or Cree ancestry); a sampling of statistics pertaining to Indigenous

women in post-secondary education and education-related professions in Canada; and a discussion exploring themes of cultural continuity and change in Indigenous women's roles particularly as they relate to education. The paper concludes with a description of the ways in which the Indigenous teacher education program which the authors co-direct has endeavoured to recognize and support the efforts of Indigenous women as culture-creators in their professional and student lives.

Data has been gathered through individual interviews, program evaluation surveys, personal experience and a review of current literature. This inquiry uses a qualitative approach which has been useful in providing access to the depth, breadth, and texture of the individual lives of Indigenous women participants.

1) Historical Perspective

Historically, Indigenous women had a central role to play in their communities, as educators, nurturers and community builders. Women's teaching roles were significant for cultural transmission because educational practices were particularly important in "the transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next" (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3, p. 433). As Danziger (1979, p. 14) points out in referring to Ojibwe (Chippewa) practices

> To fit the child into the proper cultural pattern was the general goal of family educational practices....Chippewa educational practices were aimed at teaching the child the religious, economic and political practices as well as the moral standards of of the tribe. Lessons were learned from all members of the household -- parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters -- and from respected older members of the village.

This view is reiterated in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People on education (1996). This report states that

> Traditional Aboriginal life provided the conditions for a solid childhood foundation. Babies and toddlers spent their first years within the extended family where parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters all shared responsibility for protecting and nurturing them. Traditional Aboriginal child-rearing practices permitted children to exert their will with little interference from adults. In this environment, children where encouraged to develop as thinking, autonomous human beings. At the same time, they acquired language and were integrated into the rhythms of daily life in the family and community. (RCAP, p. 448)

While the extended family was fully involved in raising Indigenous children, Indigenous women played the most significant role of anyone in the community. This was so because until puberty the children spent the majority of their time among the women. They were included in all activities of the women including planting, harvesting, gathering, counselling, healing, and so on. In this way the children's initial learning came though observation. As they became confident in their knowledge, they would begin a system of trial and error, refining their skills as they learned, with guidance and direction provided by the adults. Among the Iroquois, as Jan says using the words of Shenandoah (Barreiro, ed. 1992, p. 37),

> The women of the village taught the children, everybody's children, all the things they had to know in order to survive on this earth. They taught them how to look after one another, they taught them from a very young age what kinds of food were good for them to eat, what kinds of foods were not good for them, and they taught them medicine from a very early age. The children up to an age of, let's say, eight or nine years were in the trust, the responsibility, of the women.

Women, by their nature as nurturers were also the healers, counsellors and community builders. Due to the fact that it was largely the women who remained in the villages and tended any crops or did the gathering, they were also the ones left to manage and organize community affairs. The men were often away for hunting or warring.

While Mohawk women were free to pursue anything they were physically able to do in fulfilling the activities of their agriculturalist culture, most commonly they, like the women in the hunting and gathering cultures of the Ojibwe and Cree, were the keepers of the home. Among the Ojibwe

> Girls... learned to stay at home, converting the fruits of the hunter and fisherman into food and clothing. To make wigwams and other furnishings, to chop wood and gather berries and rice and medicinal herbs, to make birch-bark vessels and maple sugar, to dress skins and sew them into clothing, to bear children and cook meals -- this was woman's role. (Danziger, 1979, p.15)

Kohl (1985, pp. 3-4) supports this statement in his historical work on the Ojibwe, saying that building the dwelling "is the business of the women, like all the work, heavy or light, always with the exception of hunting."

It was therefore the responsibility of the women to do the work of the people and to care for the raising of the children. In this way it was the women who also held responsibility as purveyors of the culture. Cultural knowledge was passed from mother to child. Education was a communal responsibility. All adults were responsible for the education of the young.

All people were recognized as having individual gifts and talents. It was each person's responsibility to share those gifts and talents and to look for the attributes in any of the young which would suggest that they too shared the same gift. It was then the responsibility of those particular adults to nurture and develop that gift to fruition. In this way education transpired through mentoring relationships (Danziger, 1979; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996; Shenandoah, 1992).

While the education of Indigenous children and the roles of their educators have changed markedly from traditional to modern times, there are some underlying beliefs and preferences which many Indigenous people share today regarding education. Statements made twenty-five years ago in a paper produced by the National Indian Brotherhood are still held today and indicate enduring beliefs about education.

> Aboriginal control of education and parental involvement are two principals first advocated in the National Indian Brotherhood's landmark paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education". Many Aboriginal leaders speak of resuming control of education, since First Nations and Inuit exercised complete control of education for countless generations. Rather than being a new responsibility, self-determination in education was practised by families and communities in earlier times. (RCAP 1996, Vol. 3. p. 468)

2) <u>Statistics on Post-Secondary Education and Indigenous Women, Women in Education-related professions</u>

The proportion of Indigenous students graduating from post-secondary educational programs has been increasing very slowly over the past two decades as compared to the non-Indigenous population. Results of Statistics Canada nation-wide census in both 1981 and 1991 report that in 1981 an estimated 2% of the Indigenous population graduated from university compared to 8.1% of the general population. By 1991 the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous had grown with 2.6% of the Indigenous population graduating from university, a mere .6% increase, while 11.6% of the non-Indigenous population graduated, an increase

of 3.5%. (Statistics Canada, 1981 Census, 1991 Census, and 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey) These statistics, though somewhat dated are the most current available at present, and useful because they show how rare are those Indigenous students attending and graduating from Canadian universities.

Women in education-related fields of study outnumber men significantly in both the Indigenous and the general Canadian population. In the general population, 21.2% received education-related training in 1991, and of these, 15.8% were women while 5.4% were men. Among Indigenous people, education-related training is the third most common type of training after commerce/ administration and health. Of the estimated 21.7% of Indigenous people receiving education-related training, 15.3% female were and 6.4% were male. (Statistics Canada, 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey).

Similarly Indigenous women in education-related occupations outnumber men. In reviewing occupations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the experienced labour force in 1991, Statistics Canada estimated that 1.6% of Indigenous males and 6.1% of Indigenous females worked in education-related jobs. These statistics support the notion that presently, as in the past, Indigenous women commonly assume educational roles.

3) Cultural continuity in Indigenous women's roles as educators

Cultural continuity is apparent in the roles which Indigenous women presently choose to fulfil, roles which suggest continuity in women's service to the people and hence the community. Looking at Indigenous communities it is largely the women in the roles of educators, health care providers, counsellors, child care workers and social service workers. Statistics Canada (1991) figures from the latest available census profiling Indigenous employment patterns indicate that the top five of twenty-two occupations listed for Indigenous women were service (27.9%), clerical (27.3%), management/ administration (7.6%), social sciences (7.1%) and teaching (6.1% -- tied with medicine and health). These roles stress service-providing, echoing the nurturing roles women held traditionally.

There continues to be an important sense of developing and maintaining strong community connections and relationships and of building healthy and strong communities. Many of the Indigenous women who have enrolled in the Indigenous teacher education program where the authors have worked for the past

decade do so in an effort to 'give back' to the community. Their sense of purpose is rooted in the work they do 'for the people' and in ensuring that the culture survives. This work has been passed on through generations of women who have done the 'work of the people'. As Jan notes in her own Mohawk community, many young Indigenous women have watched as mothers, aunties and grandmothers helped, cared for and nurtured others in the community. How many took in children in need or left in the middle of the night to care for the ill or provided food in times of crisis and grief, as well as in times of celebration? Everything from birth to death is in the hands of the women.

Participants in Kate's qualitative study regarding Ojibwe women enrolled in a program of teacher education provided information which indicated the centrality of their concern with filling roles as nurturers, community builders and purveyors of cultural knowledge. Information gathered through informal discussions, invited review of personal writings, and recorded interviews with eight Ojibwe women over a three year period revealed patterns of enduring cultural roles. For example, when asked what motivated them to become a teacher, all eight participants expressed a sense of community connection and responsibility and a wish to contribute to their Indigenous community in particular and/or to the broader Indigenous community. Six of the eight participants indicated specifically that they were furthering own their education for the benefit of the children whom they were presently working with or would teach.

These women had a desire to respond to the perceived need of Indigenous children for Indigenous teachers. Here is what several of the participants had to say in this regard. Flora (pseudonyms used to protect anonymity) said

> I want to be encouraging. I want to be a role model in the school for the kids. Most of the kids live on the Reserve and they don't see any of the outside life and, um, they don't see any Native people working in the school. They don't see Native people working anywhere else but on the Reserve, and by being a teacher in the school I'm showing them And they also know that I'm going to school, so they know that education is a life-long experience, and I want to show them that; and, show them that learning can be fun... I'm helping to build up their self-esteem and, um, giving them interest in education.

When talking about her goals as an educator, another participant, Celia, said

> I can bring [cultural content], and being of Native ancestry that I, you know, that I would be able to bring that to them, through that channel of being a Native teacher. And that, to me is important...

Yet another participant, Joan, intended to use education as a tool to strengthen and nurture Indigenous children. As she said

> ...and I also have this great desire to, as it were, leave something with the young people and to be a part of their learning experience to help them in their learning environment, and because I work with the young people and I know them really well here [on her reserve] I thought that, well, if I get my teaching certification, then I would be able to help them even more than I am now....I thought if I could get into a teaching position - had my teaching certificate, I would want to be able to do some of those things to help the Native children and because I see more Native children, some of them are losing.., we're losing them, you know, because they are not getting what they should be getting in terms of, you know, their teaching and so forth, so I thought if I could be part of that group or have an influence on them, anything that makes the education of the young people better education for them, that certain something I would be working for....And I thought that if, uh, if the Native teacher programs could do this more of positive things of teaching in their graduates then we would be at least, uh, reaching some of our students and <u>making sure</u> that they receive the type of education that should be given to them so that they are aspiring to something, you know, specifically the whole thing is that kids are good at one thing or another, and to work on that and make them feel that they're part of society, that they are giving to society.

As it was historically for Indigenous women, a sense of their Indigenous community was central for all of these women. The most striking thing about the recorded interviews was how much all of the participants talked about themselves and their experience in relation to others. This theme emerged more frequently than any other, with all participants making comments in this area and with the frequency of comments exceeding those under any other theme, at four hundred and one instances of mention. References to a sense of self as a woman and a student were made primarily in conjunction to the multiple roles participants filled as wives, mothers, extended family members and working women and how these interfaced with the role of student. Participants reported ways in which their sense of self was affected by others as well as ways in which they saw themselves as agents who could affect others, affect positive change. Relationships factored in participants' comments about their reasons for applying to a program of teacher

education, in their learning and success while in the program, and in their intentions upon graduation. Responding to interview questions pertaining to personal change and maturity, the majority of participants mentioned relations with others as impacting upon their personal change and maturation.

Mentioned by all participants and expressed more frequently than any other single concern was a sense of community responsibility and connection. A sense of community responsibility took the form of concern for the children, concern for future generations of Ojibwe people, and valuing the well being of the people. All participants expressed a desire to invest their efforts for the benefit of their people. As Susan said,

> ...if there's something I could do for my community, then that's where I would like to be. I would like to remain working for the people.

Seven of eight participants indicated that they intended to stay and work for their home communities. (Note: The eighth participant has since the time of the interviews accepted a job on her home reserve.)

4) Women as culture-creators (plasticity of culture)

We are all the crucibles of culture. The blend in our sustaining cup is unique to each time and each individual. That Indigenous people continue to identify themselves as uniquely Indigenous, with a language and a culture, and spiritual beliefs and kinship systems, and so on, is proof of the peoples' resilience and adaptability. As Jan says

> I am Mohawk. I am a Mohawk woman. I am not a Mohawk woman in the same sense that my great grandmother or her great grandmother were Mohawk women, but I am still Mohawk. We have had to be resilient and adaptable to continue to survive as distinct and unique people. The ways in which we live our culture have adapted to the times. The material culture we perpetuate has also adapted from those traditional times. Instead of skins and hides, many traditional outfits are made from broadcloth, velvet or cloth. Beads are made from glass and plastic as opposed to shell. But these are superficial changes to the most obvious portrayals of culture. I believe that the way we think, the way we communicate with each other, our decision making and negotiating skills, the way we interact in family and community, all these remain uniquely Indigenous. And these are the things that must be taught.

Culture is not fixed and static. It is resilient as Indigenous people are resilient.

The roles that women play in education today are primarily the same, but due to the complexity of society, the roles have also become more complex. The responsibility has become to deconstruct and reconstruct culture in forms which can be taught in a education system which is primarily Eurocentric in design.

Indigenous teacher candidates in our program frequently engage in activities of culture-creating. Recently Jan asked a class of fifteen Cree and Ojibwe teacher candidates what needed to be considered in creating a framework for Indigenous education. This class expertly generated a list of fourteen points and a diagram to consider in creating Indigenous education frameworks. One woman noted that the foundation of this activity is "based on finding out who we are ourselves, culturally, to provide good role models including education and qualifications".

Some Indigenous women are looking at ways in which they may assume proactive, pragmatic roles to ensure that culture may be passed on through the education system. As Edna, another Ojibwe participant in Kate's study said

> ...[I would] like to be able to make some kind of awareness to other teachers that there <u>are</u> different -- that Native children do have different learning needs, different learning style needs....I'd like to make some sort of influence on that part. Cause I do find that even some of the, some of the teachers of Aboriginal people, they are getting caught up in the traditional teaching methods and they're forgetting specifically why they went school is to teach Native children. And I'd like to be able to, in some way, make some kind of contribution to teaching Native children. I think a lot of knowledge that I have gained...that will contribute to my developing the best curriculum that I can.
>
> ....Actually I'd like to be able to incorporate all subject areas and aim them at, uh, how to explain, incorporating, I'll give you an example. If I were to incorporate the arts and math into teaching language arts... integrating...

This holistic orientation to education may be traced from early times. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People concludes "Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically." (RCAP, p. 434)

Indigenous women, through the activity of defining who they are as individuals, who Indigenous people are, and what their cultures are, have participated in creating culture which may be passed on through the education system. Women continue to be the purveyors of cultural knowledge through the

medium of formal education. They are strong voices in advocating change in the education system, in curriculum, in education policy and in teaching itself.

5) Twenty-Five Years and Counting

Indigenous women's concerns regarding education are housed within a broader context revealing Indigenous views toward education spanning several decades in Canada. Education has many negative connotations for Indigenous people, created partially by residential schools and assimilationist policies. However, among our Indigenous teacher candidates and among those representing Indigenous views at large, a more positive orientation to education is slowly emerging. Education is now seen by some Indigenous people as a potentially powerful tool for cultural regeneration and continuity. In such Indigenous-authored papers and studies as Indian Control of Indian Education (1972); Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future: A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education (1988); and the Report of theRoyal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996), education is presented as potentially valuable if it is education which is developed by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people.

The educational goals outlined in the above mentioned three papers, written over a span of twenty-five years, are remarkably similar. All of these papers talk about the importance of Indigenous people having the opportunity to make decisions in matters which affect them, and about the necessity for content and process in education which recognize Indigenous culture. The landmark paper Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) came in response to a new set of government views promoting assimilationist policies. In this paper, Indigenous mandates for education were clearly stated:

> In Indian tradition each adult is personally responsible for each child, to see that he learns all he needs to know in order to live a good life. As our fathers [and mothers] had a clear idea of what made a good man and a good life in their society, so we modern Indians want our children to learn that happiness and satisfaction come from:
> • pride in oneself;
> • understanding one's fellow men; and
> • living in harmony with nature.
> These are the lessons for survival in the twentieth century.
> • Pride encourages use to recognize and use our talents, as well as to master the skills needed to make a living.
> • Understanding our fellow men will enable us to meet other Canadians on

an equal footing, respecting cultural differences while pooling resources for the common good.

• Living in harmony with nature will ensure preservation of the balance between man and his environment which is necessary for the future of our planet, as well as for fostering the climate in which Indian wisdom has always flourished.

We want education to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972)

The study conducted sixteen years later by the same Indigenous organization, Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future: A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education (1988), again stressed the importance of education which supports Indigenous values. In this study it was stated, among other things, that

> The right of First Nations to resume jurisdiction over education affecting First Nations students in federal, First Nations and provincial schools must be recognized by all levels of government....First Nations must develop their own national and local education policies which would reflect their philosophy, cultural beliefs and practices. Such policies must be acknowledged and adhered to by federal agencies and other governments....First Nations must control the development of curriculum materials from preschool to post-secondary levels to ensure that they eliminate stereotypes about First Nations and teach pride in our heritage, provide cultural content and promote feelings of self-worth. Culturally relevant content must be recognized by other governments and all school types as a necessary component for quality education for First Nation students. It must also be appropriately resources. Irrelevant southern curricula must be replaced by cultural content applicable to northern settings. (NIB, 1988, pp. 31-33)

Most recently, the multi-million dollar study, the Report of theRoyal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996), echoed the same concerns on the part of Indigenous people, reporting that

> Aboriginal people are diverse in their histories, environments and cultures, but their deep commitment to education cuts across all boundaries. In our public hearings, Aboriginal parents, elders, youth and leaders came forward to tell us of the vital importance of education in achieving their vision of a prosperous future. For more than 25 years, Aboriginal people have been articulating their goals for Aboriginal education. They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told

> us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically.
> Current education policies fail to realize these goals. The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada's formal education systems told us of regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution....Yet, despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education systems, they still see education as the hope for the future....Aboriginal people rightly expect education to serve as a vehicle for cultural and economic renewal. (RCAP, 1996, p. 434)

These papers point out that additions of colour added to content and to those delivering education are just the beginning. The challenge is to move from a largely Euro-centric system to a system which incorporates, advocates and teaches Indigenous ways of knowing. The challenge is to articulate what is truly Indigenous education. What is education beyond the inclusion of bits of history, arts and crafts, songs and dances? What is Indigenous education in its delivery and in its underlying foundational structures? Further, articulating these Indigenous expressions of education requires that Indigenous people have the power to enact their own education.

These are the issues the Indigenous women in our teacher education program are contemplating today. They are aware that they may be the agents of positive change in education, and are motivated to try to fill this role out of their abiding concern for their children and communities. For some, there is a sense of urgency in their desire to prepare themselves to become educators, for, as Celia, one of the Ojibwe participants in Kate's study, and others are aware

> self esteem... kids... are always so down here, you know, we've got to start bringing them back up here, so they become strong again, you know, because they're the future leaders and, you know, what's it going to be like seven generations from now, you know, if we don't start making them strong, and

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> we have to start healing our communities. It's not going to happen over night but ... I think that if we remember where we come from and if we can build upon that and start building, then the healing is going to happen, you know, more and more people become strong again, strong communities that are proud of who they are and, and know what they want and where they're going and, you know, like the ultimate for me is to see no alcoholism or drug abuse or sexual abuse or any kind of abuse or wife battering or anything, or child - you know, that would be an ultimate thing to see. But I think it's going to take a long time, but if we, we can be proud of those things that we already know and who we are, that is where the strength is going to come from. ...

The trends are clear. The messages are repeated in many places, by many Indigenous people, including the Indigenous women the authors know and teach/learn with. As has been discovered in other Indigenous teacher contexts, the women we have worked with in ATEP "have an image of themselves as participants in a political process of recovering Aboriginal...culture, and gaining control of Aboriginal education" (Friesen and Orr, 1996, p.110). By their efforts in education, they are "contesting...Eurocentrism and making space for more Aboriginal ways in schooling" (Friesen and Orr, 1996, p.110).

6) Concrete program features which recognize and support the roles of Indigenous women as culture-creators

Some steps to support the development of education which is designed by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people are possible even within the constraints of the university environment. The authors believe that there are program components which may be developed to complement and encourage Indigenous women's roles as nurturers, community builders and purveyors of culture. Such components support the creation of learning environments which recognize interpersonal and community connections; the encouragement of teacher candidates in exploring and developing methods of education which are culturally relevant; and, the creation of educational systems which recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the distinctiveness of Indigenous ways of knowing. Some of these components are employed in ATEP, and are listed briefly, below.

Program components which support and recognize interpersonal and community connections include:

• locally based steering committees in our community-based Indigenous teacher education programs composed of area Indigenous educators, university and student

representatives, with the mandate to make decisions regarding such issues as program content and delivery as well as finances, admissions and graduation;
• in-class sessions and assignments encouraging personal reflection and shared discussion on such questions as "Who am I as an Indigenous educator?" and "What are the things which must be considered in creating a framework for Indigenous education?";
• the participation of local elders and other Indigenous resource people in teaching classes and providing guest lectures;
• counselling services provided by a female Indigenous counsellor well versed in Indigenous women's issues;
• scheduling and community based delivery of courses which permits those women with family and work responsibilities to attend class without having to disrupt family life or move to a location remote from home; and
• use of First Nations schools for students' teaching practicaa.

Program components which support culturally relevant education include:
• assignments which encourage students to do research and incorporate content useful to their area;
• courses/ course modules created by Indigenous curriculum developers and which are developed under the direction of the locally based steering committees;
• Indigenous instructors and other staff members (of six ATEP staff, only Kate is non-Indigenous, and all are women);
• resources in subject areas such as Indigenous math and sciences, Indigenous women's writings, culture and history specific to the areas the teacher candidates are from; and
• curriculum design workshops which assist teacher candidates in acquiring the skills to develop their own Indigenous curriculum materials.

Program components which recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the distinctiveness of Indigenous ways of knowing include:
• affirmative admissions policies designed to increase access for Indigenous candidates and recognizing credit equivalency for such things as functionality or fluency in an Indigenous language;
• course delivery methods which cater to preferred learning modes of the teacher candidates (for example, small group discussion in place of question and answer

methods which single out the individual; and the opportunity to observe mentor teachers before trying out teaching activities);

- the optional opportunity for Indigenous forms of spiritual expression; and
- working in partnership with schools which are under First Nations jurisdiction for mentoring opportunities in teaching placements.

In supporting and furthering these program components, ATEP staff endeavour to ensure that Indigenous voice is heard within the university at large.

Conclusion

> So all through a person's life, from the time they are conceived from the time they are born, until the time they leave this earth, their care is truly in the hands of the women, the mothers of our nations, and that is a sacred trust (Shenandoah, in Barreiro, ed., 1992, p. 38)

Indigenous women who are striving in the direction of obtaining a teaching credential to benefit their communities and further their First Nations cultural identities have important roles to play in education. It is hoped that their voices have been heard in this paper in particular because much of what is available on the experiences of Indigenous students has not been produced by Indigenous authors or involved those of Indigenous ancestry as full participants. Although research on the experiences of Indigenous students in teacher education in Canada is increasing, there is presently little written material available in this area. Given that there is a pressing need for more Indigenous teachers (RCAP, 1996), and that many Indigenous students enrolling in teacher education have difficulty finishing their program of study, it is important to learn more about Indigenous students in post-secondary education. In particular, learning more about Indigenous women in teacher education is important as women comprise the majority in such programs. It is hoped that this paper may offer a small contribution toward a growing understanding of Indigenous women's concerns in education. Out of such understanding must come further discussion aimed at increasing the efficacy of programs which will serve their needs so that they may become equipped to 'do the work of the people'.

In closing, a poem from Jan, which Kate says is a most eloquent bespeaking of the woman-ness she has encountered in so many Indigenous women she has had the privilege to know....

... I need to tell you who I am so you may better understand where I am coming from. I have chosen to do this by sharing a piece of prose I composed in trying to articulate those things for myself...

Who I Am...
I am Mohawk...
Kanienkehaka...Turtle Clan...Wakeniaton...
I come from a people who have been here since the beginning of time. We are of Creation...from the Creator. Who we are is in the land we spring from and all the rest of Creation to which we are related. I am one small part of the whole. Haudenosaunee, Iroquois Confederacy - Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora.

I am a Woman...
a daughter, sister, mother and aunt. A friend. Caretaker, nurturer, counsellor, midwife. A healer. Cook, cleaner, chauffeur. A provider. A political and spiritual activist. But above all, a Mohawk woman with a deep sense of commitment to the survival of our people, our history, our culture, our language, our spirituality, our voice.
What I Do...
Empower
Myself and others,
Through my work and my voice.

This is what I choose to do.
As a teacher
and a speaker
and a storyteller
and a listener
Validate who we are and where we come from
with pride, courage, strength and modesty
So we can see where we are going
and who we are becoming
Magnificently Onkwehonwe
As the Creator intended.

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